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ABSTRACT

The concept of political alienation in American culture is examined in light of evidence gathered by social scientists. Political alienation is interpreted to include a wide variety of attitudes and behaviors such as cynicism, outraged idealism, apathy, violent protest, powerlessness, and revolutionary zeal. To minimize conceptual ambiguities of the term, the author confines discussion to four major aspects of alienation: the referents from which the person is alienated, the degree to which the person rejects the referent political institutions and processes, type of expression, and source of alienation. Findings from numerous national surveys indicate that Americans have a lower level of trust in and support for American political institutions than they did in 1964. Americans also feel more alienation from every other organized segment of society than has been the case since the early 1900s, when the first surveys were taken. Examples of ways in which alienation has been expressed are decreasing voter turnouts, split-ticket voting, student political protests, rising emigration, frustration over inflation, and anger when high expectations of governmental performance are unmet. The conclusion is that Americans will become less alienated from the political system if they begin to expect reasonable rather than miraculous achievements from political leaders. (DB)

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Alienation and Expectation in American Political Culture

by Austin Ranney

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ALIENATION AND EXPECTATION

IN

AMERICAN POLITICAL CULTURE

by
Austin Ranney
The University of Wisconsin-Madison

SØ 011 159

The Edmund Janes James Lecture
Delivered November 4, 1974

THE EDMUND J. JAMES LECTURE ON GOVERNMENT

This published version of the Edmund J. James Lecture on Government is the thirty-eighth of a series given annually to commemorate the achievements of Edmund James, President of the University from 1904 to 1920. Provision for the lecture was made in a bequest from Mrs. George Frazier, President James' daughter, in 1935. The planning for the annual lecture is by a committee from the Departments of Economics and Political Science, as provided in the terms of Mrs. Frazier's gift. This year's committee has great pleasure in adding to a distinguished roster of lecturers the name of Austin Ranney, Professor of Political Science at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

James Lecture Committee, 1974-75
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ALIENATION AND EXPECTATION IN AMERICAN POLITICAL CULTURE

In his mordant reflections on the political legacy of John and Robert Kennedy, Henry Fairlie remarks:

> One useful task which a political journalist can perform is to dislodge a cliché before it takes root in the mind of a political scientist, where it will wondrously bloom like a desert flower, however thin the soil.[1]

I suppose political scientists should be grateful for any help we can get, but the journalists' contributions do not absolve us from doing as much of our own conceptual weeding as possible.

My own recent strolls through the discipline's meadows, swamps, and deserts have convinced me that the notion of "political alienation" is one of the concepts most in need of pruning. It is, of course, an offshoot of a concept people have used for centuries in talk about their relationships to the universe. "Alienation" has been conceived in philosophy and theology as some kind of estrangement from an established faith, or community, or set of institutions. It was first introduced into social analysis by Karl Marx and elaborated by Max Weber and Emile Durkheim. And a distinguished modern sociologist says this of its place in today's social science:

> At the present time, in all the social sciences, the various synonyms of alienation have a foremost place in studies of human relations. Investigations of the "unattached," the "marginal," the "obsessive," the "normless," and the "isolated" individual all testify to the central place occupied by the hypothesis of alienation in contemporary social science.[2]

Political analysts have recently joined the crowd. Since the early 1960's talk of "alienation" has come to play an increasingly central role in discussions of what is happening in American political culture and why.[3] The view of many analysts may be briefly summarized--though not, I hope, unduly caricatured --as follows.

Loyalty to the United States and trust in its political institutions and processes were widely and deeply felt by most

Americans at the victorious conclusion of World War II. Both attitudes experienced some strain in the Truman years, and, like everything else, marked time during the Eisenhower years. They hit their peak in the idealism and hope of John F. Kennedy's administration and the first two years of the Johnson continuation. But since then both loyalty and trust have declined vertiginously. This deterioration has been a direct result of a series of disastrous national failures: notably, the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King; the bitterly divisive and futile Vietnam war; the escalating dissatisfactions and protests of blacks, Chicanos, students, women, and other oppressed groups; the Watergate scandals, by far the worst in the nation's history; the steady degradation of our physical environment; the runaway economic inflation, and through it all the constant lying of our national leaders about what is really happening and what they are doing about it. The net result, according to this view, is expressed in a sample of quotations collected by Ben Wattenberg (who, incidentally, disagreed with all of them):

> Robert Welch, the Jeremiah of the Radical Right: "The whole country is one vast insane asylum, and they're letting the worst patients run the place."
>
> Herbert Marcuse, the guru of the New Left: "American society is an explosion of insanity... the problem is not 'Who are the madmen?' It is the society that is insane."
>
> Barry Goldwater, dean of the old conservatives: "Something basic and dangerous is eating away at the morality, dignity, and respect of our citizens, old as well as young, high as well as low."
>
> And Shirley MacLaine, the La Pasionara of new liberals: "Right now the social soul of America is so sick that even the overthrow of a political regime may be insufficient."[4]

If these opinions are even approximately correct, then the United States today faces the most dangerous political crisis it has known since 1861, when two conflicting alienations escalated into history's bloodiest civil war. So America-watchers, whether journalists or political scientists, cannot afford to let their attention stray too far from the possibility that it might be happening again.

That is indeed what a growing number of political analysts have concluded in recent years. They have produced a considerable body of comment on the present and future of political alienation in America, and in this paper I shall add a bit more.

Specifically, I shall undertake four main tasks: (1) to review the evidence for and against the proposition that political alienation is growing; (2) to identify the ways in which alienation is expressed; (3) to examine the nature and degree of alienation; and (4) to speculate about its sources and consequences.

I shall begin by briefly describing the ambiguity about just what political alienation is, and by speculating how I shall use the term.

The Concept of "Political Alienation"

The Glut of Meanings

Nostalgia for the good old days is very much "in" right now, and it seems I am no exception. In reviewing the recent literature on "political alienation" I came to feel I was reliving the 1950's. Let me explain. In the mid-1950's, Willmoore Kendall and I discovered two things. First, the word was used to label a bewildering variety of different and often incompatible values and institutions. And second, some people declared that any effort to develop a single correct meaning for "democracy" was itself undemocratic![5]

Now, twenty years later, I have discovered two things about the concept of "political alienation." First, it too is used to label a wide variety of attitudes and behaviors--for example, cynicism and outraged idealism, apathy and violent protest, powerlessness and revolutionary zeal.[6] And second, "one author has even gone so far as to say that definition [of alienation] is unnecessary because we all feel what 'it' is in our very bones. Indeed, if we don't understand it intuitively we are [ourselves] alienated by definition!" [7]

A Working Conception

I propose to deal with the conceptual ambiguities of "alienation" much as we tried to deal with the ambiguities of "democracy" in the 1950's: A few scholars have carefully sorted out the various meanings, and I have chosen those most useful for my present purposes.[8]

As I shall use the term, "political alienation" is, in the first place, an attitude--that is, a way people feel (or say they feel) about political objects. Like any attitude, it has two interacting but analytically separable components: perception and affect. Perception is what people believe to be the factual state of affairs; and affect is their evaluations of and emotional responses to what they perceive.

Kenneth Keniston has helpfully pointed out that alienation has four distinct general aspects, and he advises that they be considered ad seriatim rather than all at once. I shall try to follow his advice.[9]

1. The first aspect includes the referents--what is the alienated person alienated from? What perceived political objects stimulate his or her negative feelings? William Gamson suggests that there are four levels of possible referents for political alienation, and I shall list them in increasing order of generality and public acceptance:

First, the incumbent authorities--those persons who happen to be holding public office and political power at the moment (e.g., the President, congressmen, Supreme Court justices, and party leaders).

Second, the regime--the established institutions and processes by which political decisions are regularly made (e.g., federalism, separation of powers, regular contested elections, and adversary justice).

Third, the public philosophy--"any set of principles and criteria above and beyond the reach of government and statesmen by which the decisions of government are guided and justified" (e.g., equality of opportunity, preservation of individual liberty, and responsiveness to majority sentiment).

Fourth, the political community, which Gamson defines as "a group of persons [who] are for one reason or another joined together in a common political enterprise" (e.g., the United States and the American people).[10]

These, then, are the four possible referents of political alienation.

2. The second general aspect of alienation is its nature--in what sense and to what degree does the alienated person reject the referent political institutions and processes? Several items are most often mentioned under this heading. One is cynicism, which means a feeling that public leaders will act in the interest of "all the people" only if they are compelled to do so. Left to their own devices, they will serve only the interests of themselves, their friends, and their paymasters. Another is powerlessness, which means a feeling that ordinary people have no influence on what public leaders do. A third is normlessness, which refers to a feeling that public leaders are not guided by any moral code other than their own self-interest. And a fourth is meaninglessness, which denotes a feeling that political affairs are so complicated and mysterious that ordinary people cannot understand what is going on.[11]

Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba have called attention to one more useful distinction. Some alienation, they say, is "input alienation"--that is, rejection of the fairness and legitimacy of the institutions and authorities who make political decisions. But most alienation, they contend, is "output alienation"--that is, extreme dissatisfaction with particular government policies and programs.[12]

3. The third general aspect of alienation is its expression. Whatever its referent and nature, political alienation can be expressed in many ways. In terms of peril for what the Founding Fathers called domestic tranquillity and modern social scientists call system maintenance, expressions of alienation can range from the mild dangers of political apathy and withdrawal through the middle ranges of protest and civil disobedience to the maximum threats of armed rebellion and civil war.

4. The final general aspect of alienation is its source. If political alienation is some kind of hostile attitude toward some political object expressed in some kind of protest behavior, then it must arise from some source or sources. These usually consist of some combination of the alienated person's mind-set and social status on the one hand and the political system's procedures and policy outputs on the other. As conceived in this paper, political alienation results from the interaction of public expectations and governmental performance. The main relations are suggested graphically in Figure 1; but the essential

Figure 1

The Sources of Political Alienation

Government Performance	Public Expectations: High	Public Expectations: Medium	Public Expectations: Low
High	low alienation	low alienation	low alienation
Medium	medium alienation	low alienation	low alienation
Low	high alienation	medium alienation	medium alienation

7

idea is that when public expectations are high, poor or even mediocre performance by government produces substantially increased alienation. On the other hand, when expectations are moderate or low, the same level of governmental performance produces much less alienation.

I shall have more to say about this matrix later. But before we can consider why political alienation has grown so high in the United States in recent years, we must first examine the evidence supporting the proposition that it has in fact risen significantly.

The Nature and Degree of Political Alienation in America

Some Alarming Evidence

Most of the evidence gathered by social scientists on political alienation in America consists of the answers of respondents gathered in a large number of sample surveys conducted from the early 1940's to the present. The special nature of this evidence should be borne in mind when considering the conclusions analysts have drawn from it. Briefly summarized, their main conclusions are the following:[13]

1. The overall level of trust in and support for American political institutions reached its peak in 1964. From 1964 to 1972 it declined sharply, and in the period from 1972 to 1974 it rose somewhat. Nevertheless, the basic level today is still far below what it was in 1964, and on most measures most respondents report negative feelings.

These trends can be illustrated with data from the Center for Political Research's biennial samplings of public trust in government, as shown in Table 1.

The data in Table 1 show clearly that whereas in 1964 from two-thirds to three-quarters of the respondents reported high trust in the nation's government leaders, in 1972 only bare majorities expressed such trust and only a little more than a third believed that "the government is run for the benefit of all the people" rather than "for the benefit of a few big interests."

A closely parallel decline has taken place in the respondents feelings about their own ability to influence government. The data are summarized in Table 2.

2. A second conclusion is that the American people have become alienated not only from their political leaders, but from the leaders of most other organized segments of society as well. This increasing general sourness is most vividly shown by the sharp changes in Louis Harris' confidence-in-leaders polls, summarized in Table 3.

The data in Table 3 show that between 1966 and 1971 public confidence in the leaders of the most major segments of American

Table 1

Public Trust and Cynicism toward National Government, 1960-72

Statement	Percent of respondents agreeing 1960	1964	1968	1972
"You can trust the government in Washington to do what is right most of the time."	74	76	61	53
"Most people running the government are not crooks."	69	6.	71	59
"Most people running the government know what they're doing most of the time."	61	72	58	56
"The government is run for the benefit of all the people, not for the benefit of a few big interests."	72	66	52	38

Source: data furnished by the Inter-University Consortium for Political Research. For the exact wording of the statements, see the codebooks of the Center for Political Studies, University of Michigan, for each year's study.

Table 2

Personal Political Efficacy, 1960-72

Statement	Percent of respondents agreeing 1960	1964	1968	1972
"Public officials do care about what people like me think."	75	63	58	52
"People like me do have a say about what government does."	73	70	60	60
"Politics and government are not so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on."	40	31	28	27
"Elections help a good deal to make government pay attention to people like me."	--	65	60	54

Source: data furnished by the Inter-University Consortium for Political Research. For the exact wording of the statements, see the codebooks of the Center for Political Studies, University of Michigan, for each year's study.

Table 3
Public Confidence in Leaders, 1966-73

Type of Leaders	Percent replying "a good deal" 1966	1971	1972	1973	Percentage points increase or decrease 1966-1971	1971-1973	1966-1973
Government							
Congress	42	19	21	29	-23	+10	-13
Federal executive branch	41	23	27	19	-18	-4	-22
Supreme Court	51	23	28	33	-28	+10	-18
Mean change for government leaders:					-23.0	+5.3	-17.7
Economic Groups							
Banks and financial institutions	67	36	29	--	-31	-7[a]	-38[b]
Local retail stores	48	24	28	--	-24	+4[a]	-20[b]
Major U.S. companies	55	27	27	29	-28	+2	-26
Organized Labor	22	14	15	20	-8	+6[a]	-2[b]
Advertising	21	12	11	--	-9	-1[a]	-10[b]
Mean change for economic group leaders:					-20.0	+0.8	-19.2
Professional Groups							
Medicine	72	61	48	57	-11	-4	-15
Scientific community	56	32	37	--	-24	+5[a]	-19[b]
The military	62	27	35	40	-35	+13	-22
Education	61	37	33	(44)[c]	-24	+7	(-17)
Mental health & psychiatry	51	35	31	--	-16	-4[a]	-20[b]
Organized religion	55	27	30	36	-28	+9	-19
Mean change for professional group leaders:					-23.0	+4.3	-18.7
Communications Media							
The press	29	18	18	20	-11	+2	-9
Television	25	22	17	(41)[d]	-3	+19	(+16)
Mean change for communications leaders:					-7.0	+10.5	+3.5

[a] 1971-72 [b] 1966-72

[c] Called "higher educational institutions" in 1973.

[d] Called "television news" in 1973

Source: Louis Harris Polls, reported in Ben J. Wattenberg, The Real America (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1974), p. 296.

society fell from an overall average of 47.4 percent expressing "a great deal of confidence" in 1966 to only 27.4 percent in 1971. The average level moved halfway back up to 37.5 percent in 1972-73; but even so only slightly over one-third of the respondents in 1973 had high confidence in the leaders of our government and society.

For the purposes of this paper there are two particularly interesting trend comparisons in the Harris data. The first is that among the three branches of government, and the second is that between the governmental institutions and other types of institutions. As to the first comparison, the Supreme Court declined the most in the 1966-71 period and equalled Congress' recovery in the 1971-73 period. Only the Watergate-scarred executive branch lost support in both periods and thus not only suffered the greatest overall decline but in 1973 had less popular confidence than either Congress or the Court.

The second comparison shows that between 1966 and 1971 the leaders of government institutions taken together lost confidence at the same overall rate as those of professional groups and at a rate only three percentage points higher than that of economic groups.[14] As of 1973, government leaders had a mean high-confidence rating of 27.0 percent. This seems very low indeed, and it is clearly lower than the high-confidence levels of all but three of the other thirteen sets of leaders. Yet only the leaders of medicine had the high confidence of over half the respondents, and only the leaders of science, higher education, organized religion, television news, and the military had high-confidence levels more than five percentage points higher than that of the national government's leaders.

In short, the evidence from what people say shows that political alienation increased sharply from 1966 to 1971, and, despite a small rally in confidence between 1971 and 1973, alienation today remains at a very high level. However, the same kind of evidence shows a comparable increase in alienation from the leadership of almost every other organized segment of American society. So if these data were the only evidence we had, we would have to agree that the jeremiads of the sort quoted earlier which claim that not merely the government but the whole society is sick. In fact, however, there are other kinds of evidence, and some of them tell quite a different story.

Some Reassuring Evidence

Ben Wattenberg's recent book The Real America calls our attention to some other attitudinal evidence little mentioned by most analysts of alienation. That evidence shows that when respondents are asked about the state of the nation or about how well off they think other people are, most give negative answers.

But when they are asked whether they are pleased with their own personal lives, they respond much more positively. Some relevant data are arrayed in Table 4.

Table 4
Evaluations of General and Personal Conditions

General		Personal	
Q. "In general, would you say you are satisfied or dissatisfied with the way the nation is going?" (Gallup, 1972)		Q. "In general, would you say you are satisfied or dissatisfied with your own personal life?" (Harris, 1972)	
Satisfied	35%	Satisfied	86%
Dissatisfied	58	Dissatisfied	13
No opinion	7	No opinion	1
	100%		100%
Q. "Do you think most people like their jobs?" (Better Homes & Gardens, 1972)		Q. "Do you like your job?" (Better Homes & Gardens, 1972)	
Yes	50%	Yes	84%
No	49	No	12
No opinion	1	No opinion	4
	100%		100%

Q. "On a scale from 1 (worst possible state of affairs) to 10 (best possible state of affairs), how would you rate the country's past, present, and future?" (Potomac Associates)

	Mean Ratings		
	1959	1964	1971
Past	6.5	6.1	6.2
Present	6.7	6.5	5.4
Future	7.4	7.7	6.2

Q. "On a scale from 1 (worst possible state of affairs) to 10 (best possible state of affairs), how would you rate your own past, present, and future?" (Potomac Associates)

	Mean Ratings			
	1959	1964	1971	1972
Past	5.9	6.0	5.8	5.5
Present	6.6	6.9	6.6	6.4
Future	7.8	7.9	7.5	7.6

Source: Reported in Ben J. Wattenberg, The Real America (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1974), Chs. 12-13

Table 4 shows that on each of the three sets of questions in 1972 most respondents felt that while things were going badly for the country and for other people, they were going quite well for themselves, that their present was better than their past, and that their future would be even better than their present.

Yet in 1971, when Gallup's respondents were asked, "do you think [the unrest in our country and ill-feeling between groups] is likely to lead to a real breakdown in this country, or do you think it is likely to blow over soon?", 38 percent thought it would blow over soon, but 47 percent thought there would be a real breakdown![15]

What are we to make of these strange attitudinal data? Do they mean that ordinary Americans are not very good social observers and thus fail to see that their personal satisfactions are widely shared? Or do they indicate a widespread I'm-all-right-Jack syndrome in which most people figure they are and will continue to be well off personally even though the country is bad and getting worse? Or do they merely show that in artificial interview settings most respondents convey to interviewers whatever mood is fashionable at the moment, and that pessimism about things-in-general is "in" right now? Above all, what do these data tell us about the real meaning of the increase in attitudes of political alienation which has disturbed so many analysts? This last question, I believe, is best answered when we first see how the attitudes are being expressed and what behaviors, if any, reflect them in ways that endanger our political system.

Expressions of Alienation

It is evident from the foregoing that political analysts have studied people's attitudes mainly by asking samples of them in personal interviews or mailed questionnaires how they feel about things. These studies have yielded a good deal of useful information, including the fact that people nowadays are expressing much higher levels of political alienation than they did in 1964.

Political analysts have also studied people's political behavior, mainly by observing such indicators as registration figures, election results, protest marches, riots, emigration rates, and the like. But relatively few efforts have been made to identify precisely how the attitudes people express in interviews relate to their political behavior outside interview situations. Yet this relation is surely the critical linkage for any effort to understand the actual and potential impact of alienation on American political life in the 1970's. After all, in any political system at any time, what matters most is not what people tell interviewers, but what they do.

Some theorists have suggested a number of possible behavioral consequences of growing attitudes of alienation. One is increased political apathy and withdrawal manifested in lower voting turnouts and decreased participation in other political activities. Another is increased crime resulting from decreasing

feelings of obligation to obey the law. Yet another is increased support of extremist political movements promising radical change in the nation's policies and institutions. And yet another is the increased rejection of "conventional" methods of political action in favor of such more drastic and dangerous methods as violent protest, sabotage, and armed rebellion.[16]

This all seems very plausible, so let us examine what evidence is handy on the state of these behaviors in America during the period of rapid growth in alienation from 1964 to 1972.

Political Participation

1. Voting Turnout. The data on voting turnout in presidential elections show that it rose steadily from 43.4 percent of the age-eligible persons in 1920 to a high of 62.8 percent in 1960. It dropped slightly to 61.8 percent in 1964 and 60.9 percent in 1968, but it fell precipitously to 55.7 percent in 1972. This was not only the lowest turnout in any presidential election since 1948, but also the sharpest drop in any four-year period since that from 1916 to 1920.[17] One possible explanation for the poor showing in 1972 is that the youngest age groups are known to have the lowest voting turnouts, and by adding the eighteen-to-twenty-year-olds we were bound to drag down the overall turnout rate. But this diagnosis is rejected by Richard Boyd, who points out that the newly-enfranchised young people constituted only 8 percent of the eligible electorate in 1972, and their turnout rate was only 15 points less than the national average.[18] If his calculations are correct, then the voting turnout for persons twenty-one and older was 57.0 percent in 1972--a drop of nearly four percentage points from the figure of 60.9 in 1968. This is still the biggest decline since the drop of 4.9 points between 1944 and 1948.

Boyd ascribes most of this drop to growing political alienation and cynicism, and he may be right. Yet, as both he and Gamson point out, alienation *may* result in *increased* political participation, as people's outrage is translated into efforts to elect candidates and parties promising radical change. For example, Gamson reminds us that in Germany and Austria in the period 1932-33 election turnouts rose to their highest levels in history in the elections held just before the destruction of the democratic regimes by fascist movements.[19] My own conclusion is that if increased alienation may result in *either* decreased or increased voting, then voting turnout is not a very good behavioral indicator of the level or consequences of alienation, and I shall say little more about it.

2. Split-Ticket Voting. A number of recent studies have shown that a steadily declining number of Americans admire our major political parties and a steadily increasing number call themselves "Independents" rather than "Democrats" or "Republi-

cans."[20] Low voting turnout might be one behavioral consequence of this particular form of alienation, but the consequence more often mentioned is the rise in split-ticket voting. Jack Dennis reports that whereas only about 5 percent of the voters voted for candidates of different parties in the election of 1900, the figure has risen to 32 percent in 1960, 46 percent in 1964, 49 percent in 1968, and an all-time high of 58 percent in 1972.[21] But this too is not a clear consequence of increased alienation. After all, our civics teachers have been telling us for years to vote for the candidate and not the party; perhaps the rise in split-ticket voting reflects more effective civics teaching or a higher educational level or both. Then too, Boyd points out that the main beneficiaries of this trend have been incumbents. That is, voters have tended more and more to split their tickets by voting for incumbents of both parties, and, as the 1972 elections showed, no matter how well or badly the top of either party ticket does the incumbents on both tickets are increasingly safe in office.[22] I can only conclude that a mode of voting behavior which increasingly favors incumbents over challengers is hardly a clear expression of increased alienation. So neither split-ticket voting nor voting turnout tells us very much about the behavioral consequences of the attitudes we are examining.

Political Protest and Violence

We noted earlier that alienation theorists posit increases in protest movements and politically-inspired violence is likely behavioral consequences of increased political alienation. This too seems plausible, and especially interesting. For students, professors, and chancellors of the University of Illinois are--like their counterparts at the University of Wisconsin--prone to be particularly sensitive to this indicator.

What, then, has been happening on our campuses? The large-scale student protests began at Berkeley in 1964, spread to other campuses in the late 1960's, and peaked in the "Cambodia spring" of 1970. But since then large scale student protests have almost entirely disappeared almost everywhere. Why? Some say because students have become so cynical and alienated that they have retreated into apathy, nostalgia, and the occult. If that is correct, our alienation theorists will have to revise their ideas and contend that apathy, not violence, results from alienation. Other commentators show their own cynicism by saying that student protest stopped the day the military draft ended. Still others say protest was a luxury students could afford only as long as they had no serious worries about jobs or prices or their economic futures. These various explanations may or may not account for the post-1970 quiet on our campuses; but they shed very little light on the consequences of political alienation.

In the society off campus, the "long hot summers" in the nation's black ghettoes have also cooled considerably despite the attitudinal evidence that alienation among blacks, particularly young blacks, is rising. The FBI's statistics regularly show annual increases in crime rates, but few criminologists relate these trends to any kind of strictly political alienation. It would take us too far afield to consider the whole question of whether domestic violence is abnormal and pathological in the United States or, in H. Rap Brown's famous words, "as American as apple pie." But it is difficult to prove that the ups and downs of crime and violence in America since the mid-1960's have been due mainly or even substantially to the ups and downs in the level of political alienation.

Emigration

It seems logical to suppose that one of the most drastic ways by which a person could express high political alienation to renounce American citizenship and acquire another nationality. After all, such expatriation means total rejection not only of the system's authorities, regime, and public philosophy but of all bonds to the political community itself. If this is correct, then we would expect sharply increased political alienation to result in sharply increased emigration and expatriation. Has this indeed been the case in America since 1964?

We have both attitudinal and behavioral data on emigration and expatriation, presented in Table 5.

The Gallup attitudinal data in Table 5 do not, of course, tell us whether people who say they would like to emigrate are interested mainly in better economic opportunities or a more trustworthy and responsive political system. Ada Finifter's analysis of people who say they would like to emigrate concludes that both kinds of motives are important.[23] But the attitudinal data do not show that the proportion of potential emigrants rose most sharply between 1959 and 1971, and declined somewhat from 1971 to 1974. They also show that the proportion is lower in America than in any of the other six nations in which the question was asked.

The behavioral data in Table 5 show roughly the same patterns. Emigrations rose from a rate of 15.3 per 100,000 population in 1964 to 25.9 in 1970. This is a 69 percent increase in a period of only six years, and yet the emigrants at the peak period still constituted only a tiny fraction of the population and a smaller fraction than in almost any other Western nation. The number of renunciations of American citizenship increased from 887 in 1964 to 1,474 in 1972. This was a 66 percent increase, but the total was a miniscule fraction of even those expressing the highest degrees of alienation to interviewers. So whatever

Table 5

Emigration and Expatriation from the United States, 1948-74

Attitudinal Data

Q. "If you were free to do so, would you like to go and settle in another country?"

Year	Percent replying in U.S. Yes	No	No Opinion	Nation	Percent replying "yes" in 1974
1948	4	94	2	Uruguay	41
				Great Britain	39
1959	6	92	2	Switzerland	21
				Canada	15
1971	12	85	3	Australia	13
				Spain	13
1974	10	87	3	United States	10

Source: Gallup poll, release of March 28, 1974

Behavioral Data

Year	Total Known Emigration	Rate of Emigration per 100,000 population	Total Expatriations by Naturalization and Renunciation
1950	12,587	8.3	1,245
1960	21,840	12.2	879
1964	29,211	15.3	887
1968	43,264	21.7	1,213
1970	(52,843)*	(25.9)*	1,135
1972	----	----	1,474

*Estimate based on incomplete data

Source: Ada W. Finifter, "Emigration from the United States: An Exploratory Analysis," a paper presented at the Conference on Public Support for the Political System, Madison, Wisconsin, August 13-17, Table 2

else Americans may do to express their increased political alienation, they certainly are not emigrating to other countries in large numbers nor do large numbers express any intention of doing so.

How, then, can we summarize the nature and expression of political alienation in America today? We know that attitudes of alienation rose sharply from 1964 to 1972, decreased somewhat from 1972 to 1974, but remain at very high levels today. We also know that these attitudes are not accompanied by people's increased dissatisfaction with their personal lives. We know, further, that the increase in alienated attitudes has not yet had any major behavioral consequences clearly attributable solely or even mainly to alienation.

But all this is not to say that the increase in attitudes of alienation is meaningless or trivial or uninteresting. It is not to say that it will never have behavioral consequences likely to alter the face of American politics. And whether or not such alienation impends is, after all, the question that most concerns us. I believe we cannot answer it until we have considered the sources as well as the nature and expressions of alienation. That critical topic is my final concern.

Sources of Alienation

Some Theories

For better or worse, we are up to our cerebra in theories explaining the rise of political alienation in America. One much in vogue is the Vietnam-Watergate-Inflation theory. It holds that our long and debilitating dispute over the Vietnam war made liars of our leaders, junkies of our soldiers, and dropouts of our children. And just when we finally awoke from the nightmare of Vietnam we plunged into the snakepit of Watergate, which confirmed only too well the counter-culture's conviction that most of our leading politicians right up to the President himself were not only liars but criminals. And now, it is said, even our honest leaders are incapable of even understanding let alone checking the runaway inflation that corrodes every aspect of our lives. This view has been eloquently expressed by many, but nowhere more eloquently than by Jack Newfield in his reflections on the assasination of Robert Kennedy:

> Now I realize what makes our generation unique, what defines us apart from those who came before the hopeful winter of 1961, and those who came after the murderous spring of 1968. We are the first generation that learned from experience, in our innocent twenties, that things were not really

> getting better, that we shall not overcome. We felt, by the time we reached thirty, that we had already glimpsed the most compassionate leaders our nation could produce, and they had all been assassinated. And from this time forward, things would get worse; our best political leaders were part of memory now, not hope.[24]

But some see the Vietnam-Watergate explanation as far too parochial. They point out that alienation in America is only one instance of the general sickness of post-industrial Western society. In every so-called "advanced nation," it is said, technology has fouled the air and water, urban sprawl has packed people into dehumanizing people warrens, and hedonistic materialism has destroyed all values of decency, kindliness, and respect for law. That is why student revolts and the alienation they express have taken place in France, Britain, Italy, Japan, and a lot of other nations with no Vietnams or Watergates.

A third theory views our troubles from a loftier perspective. In the apocalyptic mood of Spengler and Toynbee, it declares that nations and civilizations no less than people have life cycles. The cycle of Western civilization has been accelerating down its hither slope ever since the guns of August 1914 blew apart its foundations. Everywhere in the West, according to this view, people are alienated in essentially the same way and for the same reasons as patients are alienated who learn they have a terminal disease.

Now if we had to choose among only these three explanations, I myself would much prefer the first. For, in Almond and Verba's terms, it diagnoses our sourness as "output alienation," which means that it can be cured by picking good leaders who will make good policies and solve the nation's problems. And, like most Americans, I am reluctant to accept any diagnosis that offers no hope. But it seems to me that, at least in its popular version, the output-alienation explanation leaves out one major part of the story, and I propose to add now what I think is missing.

The Expectation-Frustration-Alienation Spiral

My thesis is that the attitudinal political alienation so prevalent in America today is largely the product of a psychological deflationary spiral. That spiral began in the early 1960's with unreasonably high expectations for the quality and consequences of anticipated governmental outputs. It was followed in the late 1960's by increasing frustration with the failure of the actual outputs to match the expectations. And it culminated in the early 1970's in the contagious notion that a system whose leaders promise so much and deliver so little must be rotten.[25]

Let us look more closely at each stage of the spiral.

Expectations

Throughout American history one of the most dominant themes in our political culture has been the conviction that we are the masters of our fates, not helpless flotsam tossed about by overpowering external forces. We were settled by people who rejected the rigidities of the Old World for the hope of a better, freer life in the New. Our national independence was founded on the conviction that people need not and should not suffer an oppressive regime stoically but should exercise their right to overthrow it. Our national development was energized by the belief that we had a "manifest destiny" to extend our dominion and our way of life across an entire continent and provide "the last, best hope of earth." And we have always believed that all problems are soluble, that it is better to do something about a problem than to do nothing even though we may make mistakes, and that our future will be better than our present because we will make it so.

The most recent version of this national creed is what the British America-watcher Henry Fairlie calls "the politics of expectation."[26] He believes it was created mainly by John F. Kennedy, and I believe Kennedy merely reinvigorated a longstanding theme in American culture. But in any case its main tenets are these: Every public problem has a solution. Solutions are found by public authorities who vigorously use reason and modern decisional technology and follow wherever they lead. Solutions are implemented by passing laws and issuing executive orders. And to settle for anything less than the solution of all our public problems is a betrayal of our national heritage.

The ringing words of Kennedy's inaugural address put it with an eloquence few others have matched. America, he declared, was founded on the belief "that the rights of man come not from the generousity of the state, but from the hand of God." These beliefs are now "at issue around the globe"; but we Americans are "unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed . . . ." Therefore:

> Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty.[27]

This was heady stuff, and Kennedy showed he meant every word in the Cuban missile crisis by his willingness to accept thermonuclear war rather than give in to the Soviet threat. The tex-

ture and flavor of Lyndon Johnson's presidential pronouncements were very different; nevertheless, he not only accepted the Kennedy vision but vowed to deliver on it where, in his view, Kennedy had failed. So he arm-twisted through Congress the most extensive program of progressive social legislation since the New Deal. Moreover, shoulder to shoulder with Rusk, Rostow, Bundy, and the other foreign policy advisers he had kept from Kennedy's Camelot, Johnson committed the nation to pay an ever higher price and bear an ever heavier burden to assure, as they saw it, the survival and success of liberty in South Vietnam. Richard Nixon thought he knew better than Kennedy or Johnson how to achieve these great goals; but he no less than they played the politics of expectation all out.

In at least one respect these past fourteen years of presidential preaching that vigorous governmental action is the key to solving all social problems has paid off. The people have come to believe it. One striking bit of evidence is their changing view of who is most responsible for inflation and who, by extension, should be charged with curing it. The data are shown in Table 6.

Table 6

Who Is Responsible for Inflation

Q. "In your opinion, which is most responsible for inflation--government, business, or labor?"

Year	Percent Replying			
	Government	Business	Labor	No Opinion
1959	14	15	41	30
1968	46	12	26	16
1972	39	20	29	14
1973	46	19	25	10
1974	48	16	19	17

Source: Gallup poll, release of August 2, 1974

The data in Table 6 show that just prior to the Kennedy era, only 14 percent of Gallup's respondents believed government was more responsible for inflation than business or labor. At the

22

end of the Kennedy-Johnson period in 1968, the proportion had shot up to 46 percent; and in 1974, after six years of "Nixonomics," it reached 48 percent. When expectations of government are this high, governmental performance had better be excellent.

Frustration

The government of the United States has seldom been more active than in the years since 1960. Yet none of its actions seem to have turned out very well. Nothing Kennedy or Johnson tried in Vietnam made the North Vietnamese give up, whether it was village pacification, increased bombing, or the commitment of hundreds of thousands of American combat troops. The War on Poverty emerged from Congress with a veritable blast of trumpets followed by the outlay of billions of dollars to help the poor; yet the life situations of poor people improved very little. Under Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon the federal government spent more on education than ever before in history; yet the quality of education has improved little if at all. The government has fought inflation by cutting public expenditures, raising taxes, reducing the supply of money, raising interest rates, installing wage and price controls, and seemingly endless presidential "jawboning." Yet inflation has continued its steady ascent, and the only new development is that we have managed for the first time in history to combine inflation with increasing unemployment and a sagging stock market.

By any standards, then, our governmental performance has not been brilliant. But to a people fevered by the politics of expectation it has been terrible. As Fairlie put it:

> When the expectations of a people--that they may accomplish anything--are so aroused and are then not realised, frustration grows and disillusion follows. This was to be, in part, the story of the United States during the 1960's. Poverty and discrimination, ignorance and disease, could all be conquered as easily as the technology could be mastered to take a man to the moon. . . . At home or abroad, what could not be done? . . . But the manna did not fall from heaven, and the people, in various guises, took to the streets. . . . The people had been taught to expect too much; above all, that their traditional processes could be transcended by the exercise of a spectacular personal leadership which manufactured, so that it might be sustained by, an elevated sense of national purpose.[28]

Alienation

According to the causal matrix hypothesized earlier, the combination of high public expectations with poor or even mediocre government performance increases alienation. In part, I think, this stems from a widespread belief that the failure of the establishment to live up to its professed ideals is worse than the total rejection of those ideals by an establishment enemy. Thus the Harris poll found in 1973 that by margins of two-to-one or more their respondents said that a dishonest used car dealer is worse than a teenage auto thief, an airline pilot who drinks on the job is worse than an airplane hijacker, and a banker who embezzles from his depositors is worse than a bank robber.[29] Given the high expectations stimulated by the rhetoric of John Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, and a host of lesser politicians, it is not surprising that so many people feel cynical about a political system that promises victory and produces stalemate, that promises peace and produces war, that promises stable economic growth and produces "stagflation."

As Jack Citrin sums it up:

> The current decline in trust in government and the public's seeming loss of confidence in a wide range of social institutions and elites are expressions of a pervasive sense of malaise. Many Americans feel unhappy about the state of the nation and, quite naturally, blame incumbent authorities for this situation. But many political cynics are probably expressing the conviction that "the times are bad" rather than repudiating the political regime on ideological grounds . . . politicians should . . . promise less and deliver more. For as long as "bad times" persist and current linguistic habits do not change, political authorities, whatever their ideological predilections, will remain the object of considerable public scorn and mistrust.[30]

Conclusion

To conclude, let us imagine that the two candidates in the next presidential election are debating what to do about inflation. Candidate A says, "It is one of the toughest problems our government has ever faced. No other nation has solved it, our experts don't know how to solve it, and I don't either. But I promise to put it at the top of my agenda and keep trying different solutions until we finally find one that works." Candidate B

says, "Let the word go forth from this time and place that I have a plan to end inflation, that we shall overcome, and that all Americans, whether government, business, or labor, will pay any price, bear any burden, and meet any hardship to make our economy once again the inspiration and hope of the world." Which statement would the voters find more convincing? Which would they regard as the kind of thing a leader should say? Which would be more likely to attract their votes?

If there is any merit in my suggestions about the sources of today's political alienation, then that alienation is not likely to be reduced very much so long as statements like candidate B's continue to be better politics than statements like candidate A's. I have tried to show that the attitudes of alienation produced by the spiral of expectation and frustration have not yet by themselves produced behaviors profoundly damaging to the Republic. Even so, they can hardly promote political health, and the longer they continue to grow the more likely they are to become their own self-fulfilling prophecy of national breakdown.

How, then, can we stop the spiral and reduce the alienation? I realize that by merely asking the question I reveal my own commitment to the belief that most social problems can be solved and that problems which can be solved should be solved. And I realize also that in the long run Americans' confidence in our political authorities, regime, public philosophy, and community will depend most upon our leaders' ability to end inflation, improve the life conditions of the disadvantaged, reduce crime, and cure, or at least alleviate, the other social ills that worry us most.

Yet those ills are more likely to be alleviated if the authorities we charge with alleviating them enjoy what Gamson calls the greatest governmental resource of all. In his words:

> for authorities to be effective they must have a good deal of freedom to commit resources without the prior consent of those who will be called upon ultimately to supply those resources. Such freedom to invest or spend the resources they have "borrowed" from members allows leaders to generate additional resources and thus, in theory, provide the leaders with a generous return in the form of public goods or increased revenues. . . . The effectiveness of political leadership, then, depends on the ability of authorities to claim the loyal cooperation of the members of the system without having to specify in advance what such cooperation will entail. Without certain limits, effectiveness depends on a blank check. The importance of trust becomes apparent: the loss of trust is the

> loss of system power, the loss of a generalized capacity for authorities to commit resources to attain collective goals.[31]

Toward that end, all of us can make a contribution. Our politicians can cool the people's expectations by presenting their programs as reasonable probabilities to improve some situations rather than as moral certainties to create a brave new world. And in making our voting choices we voters can pay more heed to what our candidates have done and less to what they will do--and how they say it. If we stop insisting that our leaders sound like Churchill in the Battle of Britain, perhaps they will less often seem like Hitler in the Battle of the Bunker.

Above all, perhaps we can take to heart one commentator's remark on learning of Lyndon Johnson's decision not to seek re-election in 1968: "He certainly wasn't the greatest President the people ever had; but then, we certainly aren't the greatest people a President ever had!" We can remember that leadership is not a force a leader exerts <u>on</u> followers: it is a relationship <u>between</u> leaders and followers, and each contributes much to its quality. If we expect our leaders to produce achievements rather than miracles, we are likely to be less frustrated with the gap between our expectations and their performances; and thus we are likely to feel less alienated from the political system in which we live.

In the sober and judicious words of John F. Kennedy, "Let us begin!"

FOOTNOTES

1. Henry Fairlie, The Kennedy Promise (New York: Dell Publishing Company, Inc., 1973), p. 131.

2. Robert Nisbet, The Quest for Community (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 15. A useful anthology on the concept of "alienation" in social and political analysis is Ada W. Finifter (ed.), Alienation and the Social System (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1972).

3. Here, as in the rest of the paper, I use the term "Political Culture" as defined by Gabriel A. Almond and G. Bingham Powell, Jr.: "Political culture is the pattern of individual attitudes and orientations toward politics among the members of a political system. It is the subjective realm which underlies and gives meaning to political actions": Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1966), p. 50.

4. The Welsh, Marcuse, Goldwater, and MacLaine quotations are all taken from Ben J. Wattenberg, The Real America (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1974), pp. 14-15.

5. Cf. Austin Ranney and Willmoore Kendall, Democracy and the American Party System (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1956), Ch. 1.

6. For a succinct and comprehensive review of the principal meanings used, see Ada W. Finifter, "Conceptions of Alienation," in Finifter (ed.), Alienation and the Social System, pp. 3-11.

7. Joel D. Aberback, "Alienation and Political Behavior," American Political Science Review, 63 (March, 1969), 86-99, at 65. Aberbach refers here to Gerald Sykes (ed.), Alienation: The Cultural Climate of Our Time (New York: George Braziller, 1964), Vol. I, p. xiii.

8. In addition to Finifter (ed.), Alienation and the Social System, I have found especially useful: William A. Gamson, Power and Discontent (Homewood, Ill.: The Dorsey Press, 1968); Kenneth Keniston, The Uncommitted (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovitch, Inc., 1965), pp. 453-474; and Melvin Seeman, "On the Meaning of Alienation," American Sociological Review, 24 (December, 1959), 783-791.

9. Cf. Keniston, "The Varieties of Alienation: An Attempt at Definition," in Finifter (ed.), Alienation and the Social System, pp. 32-45.

10. Gamson, Power and Discontent, pp. 50-51.

11. For a detailed analysis of these four items, see Ada W. Finifter, "Dimensions of Political Alienation," American Political Science Review, 64 (June, 1970), 389-410.

12. Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, The Civil Culture (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 161, 82-86.

13. The most comprehensive recent summaries of the evidence are: Jack Dennis, "Public Support for American National Political Institutions," a paper presented at the Conference on Public Support for the Political System, Madison, Wisconsin, August 13-17, 1973; and Ben J. Wattenberg, The Real America.

14. Comparisons with the communications media are not fruitful, because of Harris' significant change in definition from "television" in the 1966-72 surveys to "television news" in the 1973 survey.

15. Reported in Wattenberg, The Real America, p. 200.

16. For summaries of possible behavioral consequences of political alienation, see Aberbach, "Alienation and Political Behavior"; Joel D. Aberbach and Jack L. Walker, "Political Trust and Racial Ideology," American Political Science Review, 64 (December, 1970), 1199-1219.

17. The American Almanac, 1974, (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 1974), Table 611, p. 379.

18, Richard W. Boyd, "Electoral Trends in Postwar Politics," in James David Barber (ed.), Choosing the President (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974), pp. 181-183.

19. Gamson, Power and Discontent, p. 46; Boyd, "Electoral Trends in Postwar Politics," pp. 190-201.

20. The most comprehensive summary of the evidence is Jack Dennis, "Trends in Public Support for the American Political Party System," a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, Illinois, August 29-September 7, 1974.

21. Figure 4 in Dennis, "Trends in Public Support for the American Political Party System."

22. Boyd, "Electoral Trends in Postwar Politics," p. 186.

23. Cf. Ada W. Finifter, "Emigration from the United States: An Exploratory Analysis," a paper presented at the Conference on Public Support for the Political System, Madison, Wisconsin, August 13-17, 1973, pp. 19-20.

24. Jack Newfield, Robert Kennedy: A Memoir (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1969), p. 304, emphasis in the original.

25. For a more general version of the "deflationary spiral" hypothesis, see Gamson, Power and Discontent, pp. 44-45.

26. Fairlie, The Kennedy Promise.

27. John F. Kennedy, Inaugural Address, January 20, 1961, in Jay David (ed.), The Kennedy Reader (Indianapolis, Indiana: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1967), p. 8.

28. Henry Fairlie, The Kennedy Promise, pp. 16-17.

29. Louis Harris, The Anguish of Change (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1973), pp. 198-199.

30. Jack Citrin, "Comment," American Political Science Review, 68 (September, 1974), 973-988, emphasis in the original.

31. Gamson, Power and Discontent, p. 43.